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How far a State of DEPENDENCE and a Sense of
GRATITUDE should influence our Conduct—

A
S E R M O N

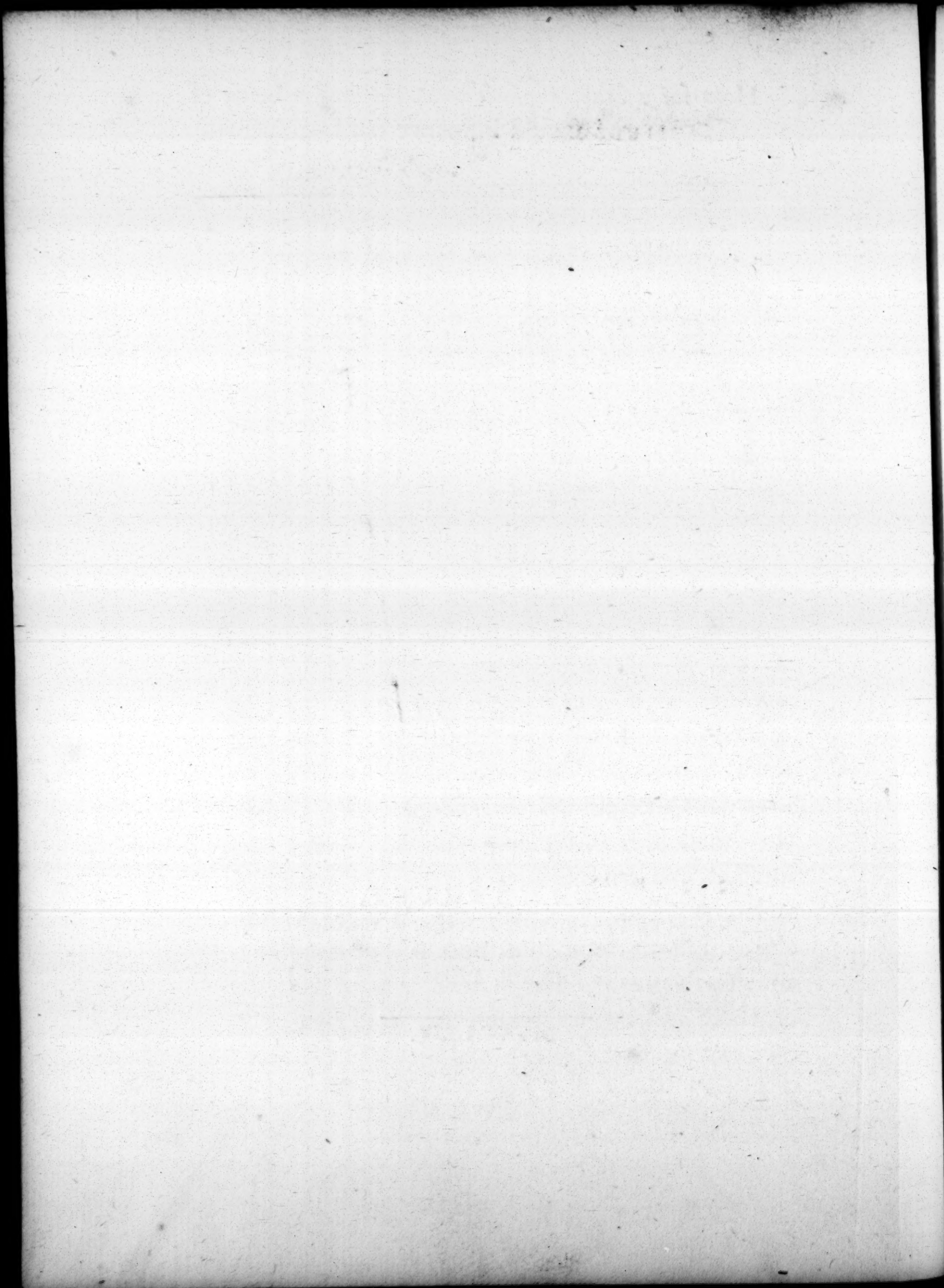
PREACHED BEFORE THE
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M DCC LXIV.



II. SAM. xi. c. part of the 20th and 21st verses.

*And if so be that the King's wrath arise, and he say unto thee,
Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight?—*

—Then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

THESE words were put into the mouth of the messenger, who was sent to acquaint king David with the bad success of his troops at the siege of Rabbah. Joab who was generalissimo of the forces, having taken a rash and imprudent step in approaching too near the walls of the city, was afraid of the King's displeasure, and the fatal consequences with which it might possibly be attended: he knew the tenderness of his master's heart, and how careful he was of the lives and interests of his people; he charged the messenger therefore, if his wrath was kindled, to appease and soften him with this welcome news, "Uriah the Hittite is dead also;" He is dead, the husband of the beautiful BATHSHEBA; He is dead, who was master of those charms for which thy soul languisheth;

eth ; He is dead, the disturber of thy peace, the let and hindrance to thy dearest pleasures.—

JOAB acted in this particular circumstance like a man of prudence and policy, one who knew the world, and was acquainted with the frailty and weakness of the human heart : accordingly we find, that whatever disagreeable sensations the former part of the message might have raised in the King, the latter dispersed in an instant ; as soon as he heard of Uriah's death, he was all patience and resignation ; he reasoned, and moralized upon the unhappy affair with the calmness of a stoic philosopher ; Go, said he to the messenger, and tell my good friend Joab, “ let not this thing displease thee ; ” I am satisfy'd of thy conduct and courage : I know how thy tender sense of honour will be wounded, and how thy humanity will bleed for the loss and slaughter that hath happened : but moderate thy affliction ; “ for the sword devoureth one as well as another : ” the fortune of war is doubtful and uncertain ; it is not either prudence, or art, or valour, that can always prevent misfortunes,
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and secure to us the victory : But tell him to keep up his spirits, “ and make the battle more strong against the city,” that at last it may be overthrown and taken.—

Now if we give ourselves leave to examine the conduct of those who have hitherto been conversant in courts ; we shall generally find that they have proceeded upon the same system of politics, with this of Joab. It hath been their business to find out the ruling passion of their master, and make that subservient to the basest and most infamous purposes. If they could discover any weakness in his soul (and where is the man who is in every part, and at all times firm and unassailable?) by flattering him in this tender and interesting point, to what a pitch of power have they not aspired, what a series of complicated villainies have they not perpetrated with impunity? History furnishes us with frequent instances of this unhappy weakness in the Prince, and wickedness in the minister. How many nations have been reduced to the very brink of destruction, by some unfortunate attachment, some fatal byass in their King to this or that particular object? Not
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perhaps that such an attachment was IN ITSELF evil and dangerous, inconsistent with the welfare and happiness of the constitution, or destructive of the rights and liberties of the Subject—but merely as it afforded the Minister a cloak for his misconduct ; as it blinded his Master to his weaknesses and imperfections ; and stood as a Screen betwixt him and the vengeance of an injured people. For the misery of it is, that however black and atrocious his crimes may be ; tho' he squander away the treasure of the kingdom in bribery and corruption ; or sacrifice, like Joab, its best blood thro' rashness and ambition ; though he introduce a system of venality, which cannot fail to corrupt the morals of the people, and sap the very basis and foundation of liberty civil and religious ; tho' he pursue such unjust and abominable measures to support himself in power, as must necessarily withdraw the affection of the people from their sovereign ; in short, tho' “ from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, there is no soundness in him, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores ; ”—yet the misery of it is, that there is no way of wounding this monster of Iniquity, but thro' the sides of the prince.

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Every attack that is made against the Minion, will be considered as levelled at Majesty; every murmur of discontent at such unwarrantable proceedings will be represented as disaffection to his person and government. This Joab was thoroughly sensible of, and acted accordingly: he knew that if he could represent the slaughter that happened (thro' his own imprudence) as a necessary consequence of obeying the PRIVATE orders of the king with zeal, and punctuality; he knew that, in such a case, the resentment of the whole army would be of no moment, the clamours of the whole people would be empty and insignificant. Nay perhaps he advanced still further, and made a merit to the King of the Odium which he incurred: perhaps he displayed in the strongest light the zeal which he had for his service, and shewed him that not the hatred and abuse of the whole nation could deter him from executing his commands, and securing to him the possession of his beloved BATHSHEBA.—

HAPPY, my Brethren, infinitely happy are we of this nation, under the mild and gentle government of a PRINCE, who, ENAMOUR'D
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ONLY OF VIRTUE, hath occasion for the SECRET SERVICES of no Joab. For alas, when once a King is possessed by any depraved and vicious Passion, there never will be wanting men weak or wicked enough to feed and flatter it. Infamous as this * propofal of David's was to Joab, we find he acquiesced in it immediately: no doubt but he had his reasons for fuch an implicit obedience; reasons of the utmost weight and importance, which would have prevailed with a man of far better principles, of more unshaken Integrity. He was called upon loudly by interest and duty; all his hopes of preferment were busy about him, and would not suffer him to leave the flowery path of honour, for the road of virtue so rugged and dangerous. Besides which, an affection for David, and a grateful sense of the favours he had already received, might possibly confirm his yet wavering resolution, and determine him to execute his commands, however unreasonable and cruel. Now as these
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* Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die. II. Sam. xi. 15.

are the two great Sources of every criminal compliance, viz. a State of Dependence, and a Sense of Gratitude, it may not perhaps seem impertinent to consider them separately, and shew how far we should suffer ourselves to be influenced by them.—

AND first, from the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune, and the relation that subsists between us as members of the same community, our interests become of course twisted and interwoven together. There are few men in a situation so singularly fortunate, as to have nothing to hope for, or fear from any one; such happy freeholders in practice and opinion, that they are obliged to pay suit and service to no man. Thus Dependences necessarily arise; and in proportion to the influence that one man has over the fortunes of another, 'tis observable that he generally claims the submission of his understanding, and the direction of his actions. He looks upon him as his CREATURE, as the work of his own hands; and expects that, like other Heathen images of silver and gold, “tho’ he have eyes he see not, tho’ he have ears he hear not, neither should he speak with his mouth.” Now, tho’ this is not a very reasonable use of
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power, to divest a man of all his senses, and degrade him into a mere machine, or tool, that is to be work'd with at pleasure; tho' it cannot be very agreeable to him to be managed like a Puppet, and dragged about with a "hook in his nose;" yet no great harm might possibly ensue, were the paths, which he is required to tread in, known beforehand to be safe and easy. But the misfortune of it is, that Superiors do not always confine themselves to these limits. Their eye is fixed perhaps upon some other's Property (some little corner of a field suppose, that will just make their estate square and regular;) and their Vassals, for as such they use their dependents, must then without scruple wade thro' the dirt, and assist them in breaking down the enclosure. They have an ugly law-suit on their hands, and it is necessary that a Witness or two should be silenced—here again is fresh work for their dependents; they must contrive some how or other to buy off the Evidence, or if that is impossible, suborn others, who may render their testimony false, and invalid. Their heart is set perhaps upon some borough—a miserable event for their miserable dependents; who at the expence of their health and honour, their conscience and constitution, must drink and swear and lye, for the

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CREDIT and interest of their Patron. But the most terrible misfortune, which can possibly arise from a dependence upon the Great, is, when mad with ambition, or intoxicated with the lust of power, they require us to prostitute our PENS to their interests, and resentments. For if we are superior in Genius and Learning to the generality of mankind (and if we are not, they will regard our Services as mean and contemptible) the mischiefs we shall do to society are many and grievous. We must distort facts, and make them bend to our purpose : we must compare and join things together, between which there is not the least analogy ; and separate others, by nice and subtle distinctions, that have the nearest and most intimate connection : for reason we must substitute declamation, and sophistry for argument : we must strip Truth of all her beauty and loveliness, and trick out Falsehood in the most glaring and bewitching colours : we must put Modesty to the blush, and defame Innocence ; must stab Plain-dealing with wit, and pursue Honesty with the shafts of ridicule : in short, we must confound right and wrong, and not only “ call darkness light, and light darkness,” but employ all the arts of soft Persuasion, all the magic graces of Eloquence, to win over others to the

the same opinion : it must be our business, our delight to delude and draw them into error ; resembling thus the wicked and abandoned Jeroboam, who is stigmatized in Scripture with having made Israel to sin. The Writings of Men thus destitute of principle, and enslaved to a party, must needs be of the most pernicious consequence ; and are like the flying Roll, which is described by the prophet Zechariah, “ as a curse going over the face of the whole earth.”

THESE then are some of the evils to which a state of dependence exposes us. Deplorable indeed, and much to be pity'd are all such cases, when men are reduced to the shocking alternative either to lose their bread, or lay waste their conscience. However it should be immoveably fixed in our remembrance that no interests, we can possibly have in other men's hands, can be of half the importance to us, as securing to ourselves a friend in God, who keeps in his own disposal the hearts of all men, and can turn them how and whenever he pleases.

BUT while we are thus careful lest our interest should blind us, or our dependence upon the Great betray us into evil ; we should take heed
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that we do not run into the opposite extreme, and thro' a too scrupulous and squeamish honesty, refuse to comply with the reasonable requests and injunctions of our Patron. Those, who have confer'd upon us any great and signal obligation, have an undoubted right to our services in all innocent and indifferent matters. They have a claim upon us of the strongest, and most urgent nature; a claim, that is founded on the sacred, unalterable, eternal Laws of Justice; a claim, which when we once reject, we shew ourselves capable of every baseness, and villainy under heaven. Ingratitude is a Sin of so black and shocking a complexion; 'tis so destructive of all generous and social sentiments; such a complicated act of Injustice; such an affront to the dignity of human nature; such a contempt of all laws moral and divine; that we may suppose, without the least breach of charity, the Wretch who is guilty of it would not even stick at Sacrilege and Murder, to promote his private views, and interests, could he commit them with the same impunity. Attend to me, my Brethren, while I analyze this composition of iniquity, and shew you the black ingredients, of which it is made up! 'Tis a mixture of Pride and Meanness, of Avarice and Envy: the first of these puffs a man up with such an

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overweening conceit of his own merit, that he thinks nothing too great and good for him ; while an abject meanness of soul makes him submit to receive obligations that his pride will not suffer him to own : Avarice teaches him to betray and abuse his benefactor, when he is no longer in a condition to serve him, and any advantage may accrue from so preposterous a conduct ; while Envy, like a sour and vicious stomach, turns the very nourishment he receives into bad humours. Thus from the scum of all these Vices, blended together, and fermented perhaps by a spirit of passion or party, springs Ingratitude: a vile and most abominable sin, that degrades a man below the savagest of the brute creation, who are to be tamed and softened by acts of kindness ; and makes him resemble that malignant Being, whose pleasure it is to destroy those first, that serve him most faithfully. Indeed the wretch who is of a Spirit so degenerate, and corrupt, as to return the favours of his benefactor with ill offices, is utterly unsafe for civil society and conversation : let him be thrust out, like the * Leper from the camp, and branded with some Mark of Infamy, lest the contagion of his example should infect others, and dispose them to evil.

BUT

* Lev. xiii. 45. and 46.

BUT it is unnecessary, and perhaps unreasonable here to expatiate any further on the baseness, and odiousness of such a disposition. One of the chief uses of Education is, not only to improve and exalt every Virtue, but by refining and softning our manners to render us more sensible of their charms: and I am persuaded that we, who have enjoyed this advantage, are in greater danger of offending thro' an excess of gratitude than a defect of it. It is difficult, I had almost said impossible, for an ingenuous Mind to resist the attacks of this eloquent and amiable Virtue. The love, which springs naturally from a sense of extraordinary favours received, blinds us to all the donor's Imperfections: we lose sight of the man in contemplation of the benefactor; and can suspect no ill from a hand, that hath imparted to us such a world of good. Having this active principle, this tender advocate within our breasts, how easy, how natural is it to listen to its motions, tho' they should even clash and interfere with our duty? Surely that fort is in great danger of being betrayed, that hath got so powerful, and treacherous an enemy within the walls!—We should beware therefore lest by an implicit concurrence with the measures of our benefactor, without duely examining their moral tendency,

tendency, we lay ourselves under the displeasure of God, while we mean only to discharge a debt of gratitude to a friend. We may comply with our patron in every thing that is lawful, and reasonable; nay, we may break through custom, and despise fashion, to oblige and serve him; we may sacrifice our opinion, our taste, our judgement to his whim and humour: but beyond this is unlawful—one step further betrays us into sin: and when we have given up our Virtue, we do not only expose ourselves to the wrath of heaven, but to the secret contempt and aversion of him, for whom we made so precious a sacrifice. For however the purposes of the Great may be served by such wicked and scandalous compliances; Integrity is the surest method of procuring their esteem, and love: because it is not only the mark of an honest and ingenuous mind; but the safest, nay the sole foundation, whereon they can reasonably hope to build a firm trust and confidence.

